



SHARP FACTS

Chlamydia

(May 25, 2004)



What is Chlamydia?

Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that is caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Because approximately 70% of women and 50% of men have no symptoms, most people infected with chlamydia are not aware of their infections and therefore may not seek health care.

When diagnosed, chlamydia can be easily treated and cured. Untreated, chlamydia can cause severe reproductive and other health problems which include both short- and long-term consequences, including pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which is the critical link to infertility, and potentially fatal tubal pregnancy.

Up to 40% of women with untreated chlamydia will develop PID. Undiagnosed PID caused by chlamydia is common. 20% of women with PID will become infertile; 18% will experience debilitating, chronic pelvic pain; and 9% will have a life-threatening tubal pregnancy. Tubal pregnancy is the leading cause of first-trimester, pregnancy-related deaths in American women.

Chlamydia may also result in adverse outcomes of pregnancy, including neonatal conjunctivitis and pneumonia. In addition, recent research has shown that women infected with chlamydia have a 3 - 5 fold increased risk of acquiring HIV, when exposed.

Chlamydia is also common among young men, who are seldom offered screening. Untreated chlamydia in men typically causes urethral infection, but may also result in complications such as swollen and tender testicles.

What is the magnitude of the problem?

Chlamydia is the most frequently reported infectious disease in the United States. An estimated 2.8 million Americans are infected with chlamydia each year. Women are frequently re-infected if their sex partners are not treated. Between 1% and 16% of young, sexually active Americans is infected - and most infected people are not aware of their infection.

What if I think I have it?

Women who have symptoms might have an abnormal vaginal discharge or a burning sensation when urinating. If not treated, the infection may spread from the cervix to the fallopian tubes (tubes that carry eggs from the ovaries to the uterus). When this happens, some women still have no signs or symptoms, while others have lower abdominal pain, low back pain, nausea, fever, pain during intercourse, or bleeding between menstrual periods. The infection may also spread from the cervix to the rectum.

Men with signs or symptoms might have a discharge from their penis or a burning sensation when urinating. Men might also have burning and itching around the opening of the penis. Chlamydia can also be found in the throats of women and men having oral sex with an infected partner.

See your doctor promptly if you think you may have a Chlamydia infection - or if you think you may have any sexually transmitted disease.

SHARP FACTS

Chlamydia

What about my sexual partners?

If your sexual partner tells you that he/she has Chlamydia, then you may also have the infection. See a doctor promptly - even if you feel well.

If your doctor tells you that you have Chlamydia - tell all of your partners promptly (or work with your doctor so someone else tells your partners). They should receive the same medication you received.

What is being done to address the problem?

The US Navy screens all new recruits for chlamydia and treats those who are infected. Also, all sexually active, active duty Navy and Marine Corps females aged 25 and under are tested annually during their Preventive Health Assessment or their annual women's health exam.

How can I protect myself from contracting chlamydia?

Abstain from sex or delay sex

Refraining from having sexual intercourse with an infected partner is the best way to prevent transmission of HIV and other STDs. People can choose to not have sex. People can also decide to wait, or delay sex, until a later time in their life. They may choose to have personal relationships that do not involve sex.

Choose Outer-course vs. Intercourse

Outer-course is non-penetrative contact, such as massaging, hugging, and kissing. Non-penetrative contact vs. intercourse can eliminate transmission risk for chlamydia.

Monogamy

Monogamy is sex between two people, who only have sex with each other, as part of a long-term relationship. If neither partner is infected, there is no risk of disease transmission. Getting to know your partner and his/her sexual history before you decide to have sex can also reduce your chance of exposure to disease. A series of short-term relationships is not as safe because of the increased risk that one of those partners will be infected.

Use Condoms and other barriers

Although not as safe as abstinence or monogamy, the correct and consistent use of latex condoms during sexual intercourse - vaginal, anal, or oral - can reduce a person's risk of acquiring or transmitting STDs. A variety of male condoms are available. Female condoms and oral barriers are also available. Condoms can reduce both the risk of pregnancy and the risk of disease transmission. Put the condom on before any vaginal, anal, or oral contact.

Where can I get more information?

Your medical care provider should be consulted if you think you may have been exposed to any sexually transmitted disease. CDC provides information through their National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922. For further information regarding your sexual health, visit the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program Home Page at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/sharp>.

This information was adapted by the Sexual Health and Responsibility Program (SHARP), Navy Environmental Health Center in Portsmouth Virginia, from material developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, STD & TB Prevention, Division of STD Prevention: Chlamydia Fact Sheet, STD Surveillance, 2002 and Supplement: Chlamydia Prevalence Monitoring Project 2002